

VZCZCXYZ0228  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBK #0957/01 0870819  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 270819Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2427  
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5729  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 8493  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 5071  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0528  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2247  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 000957

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: RTA COMMANDER ANUPONG COMMITTED TO RULE OF LAW IN  
THE SOUTH

REF: A. BANGKOK 943  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 941  
[1](#)C. 07 BANGKOK 5619

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Royal Thai Army Commander-in-Chief Anupong Paochinda told the Ambassador March 25 that the Thai military was committed to addressing the unrest in Southern Thailand via military operations that follow the rule of law and by attempting to win over the hearts and minds of Southern insurgents. Anupong stated his personal hope for democracy in Burma but painted a limited role for the Thai Army in pushing for political change there. End Summary.

ARMY TRYING HARD IN THE SOUTH BUT UNDERMANNED  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) In a March 25 meeting with the Ambassador, Royal Thai Army Commander-in-Chief Anupong Paochinda said the Royal Thai Army (RTA) would continue to support the RTG's strategy of addressing Southern unrest. Most importantly, the RTG was trying to "socialize" Southern insurgents by improving social, political, educational, and economic conditions so as to change the way of thinking of Southern insurgents. Security forces and government officials would promote the rule of law in order to prosecute suspected insurgents and military operations were necessary to improve the security situation. Anupong, however, was very frank in discussing the challenges that the RTG faced. Regarding the social aspects, the Army Commander said other Thai ministries have had a difficult time making a positive impact and the South would remain a long-term problem. One problem was scholarships provided to southern students by Muslim countries to study abroad. Upon returning to Thailand, these students had difficulty integrating into the Thai society as they were not proficient in Thai. The rule of law had been difficult to implement as the Royal Thai Police had difficulty building cases for prosecution. As such, the RTA was working with the police to build cases and assist with gathering evidence.

[1](#)3. (C) Anupong admitted that RTA soldiers have been unable to build close relationships with local communities and this had reduced the effectiveness of military operations. To address this issue, Anupong had decided to change RTA policy and deploy troops in every district of the three Southern

provinces. Unfortunately, the RTA had struggled with implementation as there were not enough troops to carry out the policy. Another factor that had reduced the RTA's ability to find insurgents was that the Army had been tasked with securing locations such as schools, government buildings, and temples. Despite this Anupong believed that the RTA was making progress in resolving the Southern unrest.

14. (C) Anupong admitted that IEDs were a significant problem for the RTA. Insurgents often planted bombs at night and, therefore, the RTA was searching for the means to conduct nighttime surveillance or to detect IEDs. The Army had been considering purchasing UAVs for surveillance purposes but budget constraints made this unlikely. The RTA was consequently open to assistance in developing its capabilities in dealing with IEDs.

#### ICRC ACCESS IN THE SOUTH?

-----

15. (C) The Ambassador reiterated to Anupong that the USG considered the South a domestic Thai issue but that the RTG could possibly allay criticism from human rights organizations (Ref A and B) if it provided the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with access to suspected insurgents while in detention. Anupong said he was worried that an ICRC role in monitoring detainees could be a first step towards internationalization of the southern unrest. Nonetheless, Anupong assessed the proposal worthy of consideration but said a decision to allow access by the ICRC would require a national level decision.

16. (C) Anupong emphasized to the Ambassador that he has provided clear orders to troops in the South that the rule of law must be followed. Sniper squads were not allowed to take out suspected insurgents and detainees must be granted full rights as allowed by Thai law. Torture, abuse, and interrogation methods that did not meet international standards would not be tolerated, Anupong said. Despite these clear orders, Anupong allowed that it was possible that individual soldiers could have broken the rules of engagement. Anupong stressed that the RTA would immediately investigate and hold soldiers accountable for their actions if his orders had been broken.

#### MARTIAL LAW TO BE LIFTED?

-----

17. (C) Anupong told the Ambassador that policies on access to detainees may change soon as Prime Minister Samak's government was reviewing martial law (Ref C) in Thailand. Samak was expected to make a decision in early April, Anupong said, and there was a distinct possibility the PM would lift martial law throughout the country. If Samak did lift martial law, policies regarding time limits for detentions in the South would change. (Comment. Security procedures in the deep South are also regulated by the 2005 Emergency Decree. It is not clear to us that lifting martial law while leaving the Emergency Decree in place would necessarily result in significant changes to detention procedures. End Comment.)

#### RTA CONSTRAINED IN TRYING TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE IN BURMA

-----

18. (C) The Ambassador explained to Anupong that U.S. policy on Burma supported the Burmese people's desire for democracy and asked Anupong for his assessment of the situation there. Anupong emphasized to the Ambassador that the RTA did not have the means to bring about change in Burma. As Burma policy was made at the national level, Anupong said his views on Burma did not influence Thai policy on the matter. Despite these challenges, Anupong wished he had the means to assist in accelerating the transfer of power to a democratic government in Burma. While acknowledging criticisms in the drafting of the Burmese constitution, Anupong said he hoped that the charter would be a starting point for progress towards an elected government in Burma.

¶9. (C) Anupong described the difficulties that the RTA faced due to the lengthy border Thailand shares with Burma and the large population of Burmese living in Thailand. Border security and narcotics trafficking were of primary concern for the RTA in relation to Burma and one avenue for engagement with the Burmese regime could be on narcotics trafficking. Anupong, however, was worried that such engagement would lead the Burmese regime to push for the RTG to crack down on ethnic groups along the Thai-Burmese border.

¶10. (C) Despite his personal wishes for a democratic Burma, Anupong expressed concern that the ethnic groups such as the Karen would not accept a democratically-elected government in Burma and would rather push for independence. Maintaining national unity was the Burmese regime's primary goal, Anupong said.

COMMENT

-----

¶11. (C) Anupong was unusually open and willing to engage on the South and Burma and he repeated promising statements regarding investigating alleged abuses in the South. That said, we will continue to encourage Anupong and other RTG officials to conduct thorough investigations of allegations by human rights organizations, especially in light of recent, disturbing reports.

JOHN